

RON MAIN

Ron Main was employed as a staff advisor to the King County Council on land use planning issues, and subsequently was employed as King County's director of intergovernmental relations from 1981 to 1995. He is currently a government relations consultant.

Ron has an undergraduate degree in urban planning and a graduate degree in public administration.



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Tape 1, Side 1

Rita R. Robison: This interview with Ron Main is about the history of Washington State's Growth Management Act. The date is February 9, 2006, and the interview is taking place at the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) in Olympia. My name is Rita R. Robison, and I will be interviewing Ron Main today.

Rita: What interest did you have in growth management and land use planning before the passage of the Growth Management Act in 1990?

Ron: Well, I have an undergraduate degree in urban planning, and beginning in 1974 to about 1980 I worked for the King County Council as a policy adviser on planning and zoning issues. And in 1981 I was appointed director of government relations for King County as their chief Olympia lobbyist. Of course, growth management issues and planning issues were often part of our legislative agenda, and those issues arose nearly every year. And then, of course, the Growth Management Act discussions got into full swing in 1990.

Rita: When did you start thinking about growth management? When did you say, "Okay, we need to do something about this?"

Ron: Well, in King County I think as an adviser to the council on growth management; King County was one of the first counties in the country to actually adopt a comprehensive land use plan in 1964. So the county had always been pretty much on the cutting edge of that. And for me, personally, working for the county, one of the major issues that I encountered was the fact that while King County was able to do a comprehensive plan in the unincorporated area of the county that it was not in a position to control other factors driving growth. And most particularly the fact that Metro, the sewage agency, was making decisions about where and how to lay sewer pipe that trumped King County's ability to actually say, "Here's where we want growth."

So we, in King County, began an effort to actually merge Metro with King County. And that was really driven, not by a desire to necessarily take over transit, but really more with respect to being able to control facilities that drive growth, and that meant being able to make decisions about where sewers would go.

One of the innovative things that King County did during that period was to adopt a general sewage plan for King County that actually said, “Here’s where we want areas to be sewerred to accommodate the kind of density that we want to accommodate.” And at that time Metro, and to some extent local sewer districts, didn’t appreciate the fact that the county was trying to dictate those kinds of terms. So that issue definitely captured my attention and my interest.

Rita: What role did you play in the passage of the Growth Management Act?

Ron: Well, the passage of the act occurred over a two-year period. And in Year One, I was asked by Speaker of the House [of Representatives] Joe King to bring in some folks from King County that had expertise on policy regarding particular issues revolving around impact fees and others. So, I brought in two women from King County to work with the speaker and to work with the leadership, to help them define the issues and sort of fill in the blanks.

And I was involved in negotiating with other interest groups on some of those issues, particularly issues revolving around impact fees. Because, as some people will recall, in 1982 as part of an effort to gain passage of local option taxing authority for cities and counties, local governments agreed to a ban on local authority to impose impact fees. Republicans had control of both the House and the Senate at that point in time, and the development industry, led by the Seattle Master Builders, was scared to death that local jurisdictions in the state were going to start imposing impact fees. Impact fees actually became very popular in California after the passage of Proposition 13 that limited property taxes, so the builders were very concerned that that trend was going to extend here. So in 1982 they made a demand that cities and counties surrender any authority they had to impose impact fees, even though at that time I think maybe—maybe Snohomish County or Everett, it might have been Snohomish County that actually imposed something like that, but they were the only jurisdiction in the state that had done so. So we agreed to say, okay, we cannot impose impact fees because... and the rational now was that number one, we were getting a new second half-cent local option sales tax for cities and counties. But number two, just as important, is the fact that cities and counties were also going to be given authority to impose a new one-quarter of 1 percent real estate excise tax for capital purposes. So the idea was that this was a reasonable trade-off for giving up the authority to do impact fees.

Well, as time progressed and as we now move forward, you know, eight or nine years to 1990, as growth management came to the floor—and understand that King County was always sort of in the lead in the state on growth management, I mean King County, even prior to the Growth Management Act, had very detailed, good comprehensive plans, general sewage plans, facilities plans...

Rita: And they had the growth too.

Ron: And they had the growth. So King County was sort of a role model for how to do this. That’s why I was asked to bring these other folks to the table. In Year One of the Growth Management Act, the principle issue that I was involved with was reauthorization of developer impact fees. Because the development community, and particularly the master builders, understood at that point in time that local government didn’t have the resources, the proper infrastructure necessary to support growth. So, in my opinion, the development community looked ahead and said, “You know, we’ve got a problem there, we’ve got to do some sort of a deal

on reauthorizing impact fees because if we don't we're going to be caught in concurrency standards. As a matter of fact, they're just going to shut it absolutely down." So they were interested in putting something back together along those lines. We did put that back together, and it was very carefully drafted, and it was agreed to, so that was a major accomplishment in Year One that we were involved with. And other issues, of course, came along in Year One, and there was a lot accomplished in that first year.

I'll follow your outline here but I'd kind of like to get into what the kind of political and policy drivers were that, in my opinion, led to the Growth Management Act, people's interest in the Growth Management Act in 1990. Then sort of skipping ahead to what kind of pressure was there from the public to do something.

Rita: Okay, let's skip ahead to that. What kind of pressure was there from the public to create a growth management strategy?

Ron: Well, I'm going to respond to this because it's kind of tied back to why, in my opinion, the development community was interested in negotiating some settlements on this. Politically, growth management was always the hot issue in King County, and particularly in East King County. In communities like the Sammamish Plateau in the '70s where it was largely rural, and King County was doing community plans on how they might develop it. And you may recall that Mike Lowry was elected to the King County Council in the mid-70s in what are now pretty strong Republican districts, the 41st Legislative District, the 48th out into the 5th in Issaquah. He ran on a platform of controlling growth and Republicans out there voted for him based on that. So he came on to the county council interested in growth, and he was sort of the driver behind the whole issue of questioning Metro and trying to bring facilities and comprehensive plans into line so that the county could actually control what was happening out there.

Also on the county council was councilmember Bill Reams who was also strongly interested in growth management. And he was a big driver behind putting together the provisions in the county code with respect to the use of hearing examiners and very interested in planning districts. But in 1989, a guy name Brian Derdowski came along and beat Bill Reams in the Republican primary claiming that Reams was not paying attention to growth and that Derdowski was the guy to vote for. And Brian was elected. Well, that created a tidal wave I think. Particularly in Republican districts in East King County and elsewhere in the Central Puget Sound Region, in suburban districts where Republican officeholders took notice and said "Hey, wait a minute here, we better start paying attention to growth management." And I think Joe King capitalized on that kind of a political move in a big way because it was clear that based on that one election, that from Joe King's perspective, who at that point in time was thinking about maybe running for Governor, that here was a key for Democrats to begin to move into Republican areas. It was very clear, that even though folks living in these districts were Republican, that they cared a whole lot about growth management. They cared about the quality of their environment. And they also were smart enough to understand the relationship between growth and government's ability to support that, whether it's schools, whether it's parks, whether it's roads.

Rita: You have traffic congestion getting bad.

Ron: Because traffic congestion was getting bad. So these were issues that Democrats saw as an opportunity. And so politically, the builders saw the writing on the wall and realized that they were going to need to figure out how make this thing work.

I'm going to sort of lead back then to the second year, the 1991 negotiations. I realized I'm skipping around here.

Rita: Well, we did want to know about WSAC's position.

Ron: Oh, let's go to WSAC's position. I think that at that point in time WSAC's...

Rita: And that's the Washington State Association of Counties.

Ron: The Washington State Association of Counties had always been—I mean the position of WSAC on these growth management issues had been for planning, for good land use decisions, against legislation that would try to dictate to the counties how they ought to do things. But generally speaking they were for a rational planning process. And during the process, during 1990, WSAC was pretty much following King County's lead on this, at least in the early stages of the negotiation. I think after the Growth Management Act was adopted, skipping forward to probably '93, '94 when the people occupying county commissioner positions around the state changed pretty dramatically—that then, all of a sudden, part of the issue that they were running was the Growth Management Act and their opposition to having the state be involved and being able to tell them what or what not to do. But at least during 1990 and '91 that was not an issue that was percolating up through WSAC because the WSAC leadership and county commissioners around the state were all pretty much on the same page at that point in time. And they were at the table but it was basically King County sort of leading on some of these policy questions.

Rita: So what was it that King County wanted out of this process? You talked about how they were having problems because Metro was pushing the sewer lines out. And you said that they had a comprehensive plan, and they had an interesting impact fee, but what did they want? Were they concerned about growth in the rural areas, was that their main concern? How growth was sprawling out into the rural area?

Ron: Yes, at that point in time, I think King County's principle concern was to make sure that the Growth Management Act did not somehow interfere with, or run contrary to, the policies that were being driven by leadership on the King County Council and down at the County Executive's Office. So there was that principle consideration. At the same time coming out of that, King County was looking at governance questions because there had been a lawsuit filed challenging the Metro governance structure, and King County was looking to assume those county-wide Metro functions and to assume a regional role. And so that was kind of a policy consideration for King County going forward, Would the counties be empowered to at least talk about what the county-wide plan policies ought to be and that they have a significant role in that? And to be able to, which of course eventually happens with the assumptions of Metro by King County, really control, as part of its planning, where the facilities are located? And as it turns out, basically the act did not damage King County's ability to do any of those things, and in fact it complemented it. And King County was somewhat concerned about—I think all counties were somewhat concerned—the role the state should play about the creation of the growth management hearings boards. They wanted to make sure that they would work in a complementary fashion.

Rita: Well, we heard from Busse Nutley [chair of the House Housing Committee] and Mary Margaret Haugen [chair of the House Local Government Committee] in our interviews that they definitely wanted a bottom-up approach.

Ron: Yes.

Rita: So what about King County? Is that what they wanted too?

Ron: Yes. I think that both Busse and Mary Margaret would agree that what we ended up with, back then, could be characterized as a bottom-up approach. The responsibility to plan, not just set urban growth boundaries, but to also plan how to finance improvements necessary to implement those urban growth boundary

plans, or those comprehensive plans, was entirely in the purview of local government—and that it was really a tough balancing act to come to. And the growth management hearings boards—they were designed to be an appeals body—it wasn't intended that the state be able to dictate how to do things. In fact, even CTED was empowered to provide assistance and that was an inducement, you appropriated the money to do that. And the act was set up to require that counties that were experiencing growth were mandated adopt plans under the GMA, and other counties could opt in or opt out. The fact that there was money out here to help caused a number of those counties to opt in, and that created a political problem down the road.

Rita: Busse Nutley talked about that at length in her interview.

Ron: Right. But there's another little key point, a little thing that occurred as far as the Growth Management Act that people weren't, I don't think, paying a lot of attention to. Leading up to the Growth Management Act, there had been quite a debate about how to handle wetlands and to protect wetlands. And Governor Gardner was particularly interested in doing that, and tried unsuccessfully for a couple years running to pass legislation to protect wetlands. And Joe King tried to run a bill, I remember the night very well, he tried to run a bill to protect wetlands and he ran it out on the floor. And then Representative Jim Hargrove stood up with an amendment to exempt out the entire Olympic Peninsula; that amendment passed. So the bill went back to Rules [Committee]. As part of the GMA, Governor Gardner successfully pushed for the requirement that all counties be required to identify and adopt environmentally sensitive area ordinances whether they were required to plan under GMA or not. And those ordinances started to appear in the early '90s, now we see it again ten years, whatever, later.

Rita: Fifteen.

Ron: Fifteen years later. The property rights movement people started to go “to the mattress” so to speak. They came down here complaining about that. Of course now, looking forward, King County and other counties are adopting new versions of these same ordinances so that these folks have been empowered again and now we're looking at some sort of an initiative. Anyway, that's a piece of the Growth Management Act, in my opinion, a significant piece that is often overlooked by people that worked on the GMA.

Rita: So back to Year One. What about the Steel Magnolias, how did that work? How did King get them lined up, and was everyone charged up?

Ron: Well, I think Joe did a great job, yes. He didn't have any trouble that I was aware of, lining them up. They were very, very strong and he had to, I mean—Joe King was smart enough to recognize that he couldn't run this thing simply out of his office. He needed the help of these people. Joe said, “Here's basically what I want to accomplish. Go out and do it, make it happen.” Well, when you look at Busse Nutley in particular, and Mary Margaret Haugen and Ruth Fisher, they were three that were particularly active and all the others were as well, all those women were working this issue. And they sort of divided it up, so we were moving, as the negotiations proceeded, we were moving from one set of issues to another and that made it very interesting.

Rita: So it was very unusual to have that kind of breaking up of the bill and taking pieces and then putting it back together.

Ron: Very unusual. It was very unusual but it was really a smart move on his part because they could do it. And then, you know, there was bipartisan cooperation on a lot of this stuff, at that point in time too. I mean, not a lot, but there were times because there were people in the Republican Caucus, particularly from suburban districts that saw this as something they needed to get behind. That was quite a stroke.

Tape 1, Side 2

Rita: So when we ended on the other side of the tape you were talking about bipartisan cooperation.

Ron: Among the Steel Magnolias. I think the Steel Magnolias successfully brought in folks from the other side of the aisle. Louise Miller played a key role, for instance, in these negotiations; she was very attune to all this, and was a very influential suburban Republican legislator who later was elected to the King County Council. And others as well. I think Jean Marie Brough was in the Legislature at that point in time and was involved at least in Year One, a Republican from Federal Way—and others that just escape my memory right now. But I think that was one thing that the Steel Magnolias were very successful in doing, which of course they deserve a tremendous amount of credit for, I mean the credit really, politically, for bringing this thing together really accrues to them in my opinion.

Rita: What was the original intent in the Growth Management Act? Why do you think the Growth Management Act became law?

Ron: That's a terrific question because a lot of people will for sure respond differently to that one. But I'll tell you, from my perspective, the Growth Management Act was about directing public investment in a smart way. People were beginning to recognize that unplanned growth was creating a demand for services that folks were simply unable to meet. And at that point in time cities and counties were working with the [Washington State] Department of Transportation seeking gas tax increases every couple of years. And typically those were all Republican-backed measures then, I mean the gas tax increases. And Democrats were more reluctant to vote for them. People like Joe King said, "Hey, wait a minute. What are we doing here? You guys are always coming in and asking for more money, and what's driving this? What's driving this is a lot of unplanned growth." A lot of the focus in Year One was not just on the mechanics of land use planning issues, but really dealt with investment strategy; requirements that capital plans must match land use plans were a very key issue. And as part of the Growth Management Act some additional tools were brought to the table. We've already talked about the developer impact fees, but a second quarter percent real estate excise tax was also provided. And it was assumed that when these plans came into place and these capital plans were aligned, that then there would be a rational basis for going back to the public or coming to the Legislature and saying, "Okay, we need more money to support the growth that we're experiencing." That, in my mind, was the principle driver behind this. Now the environmental community didn't necessarily buy into that as well, they had their own agenda. And that's why following the adoption of the Growth Management Act in 1990 they went forward with their own initiative. And, at that point, those of us who had been negotiating GMA Chapter One were, of course, upset with that but they had their reasons for doing it. They felt like they'd been cut out of the process. I didn't see how they were cut out of the process, but they felt that way.

Rita: They wanted something stronger.

Ron: They wanted something stronger. But I actually went to one of their meetings in Seattle one time and told David Bricklin, I said, "For somebody who's a supporter of growth management this is as good as it gets. I mean, you folks have no idea. You challenge this thing and it's not going to help, and you're not going to win." And they didn't. We had a whole coalition of other folks that had been working in good faith on this thing that basically stood up together and said, "The initiative is not necessary because here's what we have done. Read the initiative." The initiative went down. And then we got to the next year.

Rita: Well, then there was 1991 and major growth management amendments, Growth Two. So what did the

Washington State Association of Counties think about the 1991 amendments to the Growth Management Act that created the growth management hearings boards and other implementing measures?

Ron: They were at the table, represented by Rick Wickman and myself. I mean, even though I worked for King County, I was sort of acting as the behest of the association on this issue. And the outcome of this—I mean not everybody was thrilled to death with all of the amendments, but I think there was some concern about the role of growth management hearing boards and how that was going to work out over time. But by and large the counties were happy with the outcome of those negotiations. I have kind of an anecdote that I can tell, but perhaps it's a little bit too early.

But those negotiations, let's talk about them. At that point in time the Steel Magnolias and Joe King brought us in and gave us instructions that we were to negotiate, and on the other side of the table was the entire business community. So you had the business community, and you had local government representation. And so you had cities, counties, and the business community; AWB (Association of Washington Business), Boeing, Weyerhaeuser, master builders; there were big investor-owned utilities. Everybody had issues that they wanted included as part of Growth Two. So the negotiating committee itself became sort of a band of brothers and sisters even though we represented different interests. The way we set the tone was that we would basically conduct our own sort of hearings and invite people to come in and present their issues. And then the core group sitting around the table would say, "Well, what are we going to do about this, and how does this work?" The end product was going to go back, of course, through the Steel Magnolias, but also back to what was then the Five Corners, which included all four caucuses and the Governor's Office.

Rita: Right.

Ron: So we, the negotiating group, worked on a number of other issues, and they were very significant. I think about all of the issues and there were some fun stories about that, about those negotiations. But my thinking on behalf of King County was that, "Okay, this is the time to establish counties as a regional player in this part of the planning process." So that was kind of an overriding concern that I had. There were other counties that didn't particularly care for that approach, and probably most notably Kitsap County because Kitsap County was an urban county but virtually unincorporated at that point in time. The only incorporated area of Kitsap was just Bremerton and you had major unincorporated places like Silverdale. So the county commissioners in Kitsap County were not as enthused about the idea that the counties should try to evolve from being a local sort of provider to be a regional service provider. But we pushed that, and that was included as part of the act.

A number of other issues that we dealt with—I mean we had people coming in. For instance, Pat Dunn was representing some recreational property development stuff in the Olympic Peninsula or someplace, and we had his issue inventoried as one that our negotiating group was going to hear from. It was a Friday night, it was about seven o'clock, you know, springtime, everybody's got better things to be doing. It might have been even later than that; I think it was nearly nine o'clock. And he was supposed to be there and he didn't show up. And I'll never forget it, I turned to Enid Layes and I said, "Well, he's got an hour to get here because we're not coming back for this issue." So they called Pat Dunn in Seattle and said, "You've got an hour to get here." And Pat Dunn arrives in his bathrobe and his pajamas and we discussed his issue.

At various points in time people—Enid Layes was really the slave master here on this. She wanted these negotiations to go on, you know, to keep cooking through all these issues at certain points in time. Some of the other lobbyists representing local government wanted to go home and go to bed. But we were really under a

tight deadline and we were under a directive, and we took the task seriously.

Rita: So there was some pressure to get it done.

Ron: There was definitely pressure to get it done. There were so many issues that we covered in great detail. The specifics in the plan having to deal with the treatment of ag lands. I've just forgotten a lot of the details, but important issues.

One, however, that I do remember as if it happened yesterday—of course it kind of did—had to do with school impact fees. When Joe called me into the office and said, “I want you to be part of the negotiating team on Growth Two,” and Rick Wickman was with me, both of us were in there. I turned to Rick and said, “Well, this is fine, but let's go to Senator Hayner,” who was the majority leader in the Senate at the time, “and make sure that she's on board with this.” So we walk over to Senator Hayner's Office, she calls us right in and says, “Yes, absolutely, I'm behind this, this is a Five Corner process. As we were leaving she asked if local governments were willing to address the school impact fee issue that was of concern to the developer community. I responded that I understood our charge to tackle any outstanding issue, and as I recall in Growth One, that the school districts themselves were empowered to impose impact fees and the development community didn't like that. So the idea was to pull back from that and try to get it done some other way. And I forgot exactly what the solution was that they had in mind. But in my mind that was the ultimate leverage, to try to achieve what it was that we wanted to do, that that was an issue that we would kind of keep till last and get through everything and then we'd go to that issue. So we did. We went to that final issue on school impact fees after quite a bit of the discussion, negotiation, and talk. We agreed about impact fees for local government, cities and counties. We agreed that yes there was a better way to do this and we were going to withdraw, recommend that that provision be changed. We turned our findings into basically a report to the Five Corners committee. The Five Corners committee met—

Rita: But wait, before you go on to the Five Corners one of the questions was about accommodating the opposition and why did groups oppose it? So the process that you just talked about, that's how the people opposed were accommodated, to have this negotiation process that you just described going on?

Ron: Correct, correct.

Rita: And that's how. And so then there were compromises made and the opposition was accommodated, the people who were willing to come and be around the table?

Ron: Yes, that was the idea because at the outset there were some unhappy people left over from the year before. Mostly about specific issues and the way certain lands were going to be treated under the act. So that's what we get. And then at the end, then we agreed that, “Yes, we will agree with you development community. The Growth One addressed school impact fees wrong and we're going to agree to do something different.” So that recommendation went forward together with all of the others.

Rita: Right, and then it went to the Five Corners.

Ron: Then it went to the Five Corners. And the Five Corners met in closed session, all of us were sort of waiting outside. They went over all of the issues and they adopted all of our recommendations, except for one. And the one that they did not adopt, as I recall, I'm sure that's the only one, I could be wrong about that but I'm almost positive that was the only one they did not adopt, was the recommendation on school impact fees. For some reason, even though Senator Hayner wanted to move in that direction, the outcome out of the Five Corners meeting was that it was not adopted. And that came as quite a surprise to all of us. And, of course,

the development community was very upset by that and went to their Republican friends in the House and the Senate to express their displeasure about this particular issue. And they were unable to change anybody's minds. At that point in time we as local government said, "This is what we agreed to, we agreed to this," and we told members of the Legislature and the Five Corners, we said, "We agree to this." I'm sure there might have been suspicion that there might have been some double-dealing going on here, on that issue. And I know for a fact that there was nothing because you didn't have time to double deal because we're all locked up together. So I don't know what happened there, I mean, I have theories. There were a lot of smart people sitting around that table in those Five Corners meetings, including a very smart guy from Skagit County named Senator Pat McMullen who could figure some things out on his own as well.

Rita: Well, it was important legislation and the stakes were high.

Ron: The stakes were extremely high. It's the most high stakes piece of legislation that I've been involved with in my 25 years here in Olympia, and certainly the most intense and interesting.

Rita: What is your most important memory of the dynamics of the events leading up to the enactment of the GMA?

Ron: I think I've kind of covered that—I mean when you were talking about what do I remember? I think what I remember, in closing, was the Five Corners discussion, the Steel Magnolias, everybody lined up ready to go on this. And that it happened, it just went forward despite the fact that the development community was very disappointed on this one issue, it did go forward. And I didn't think that we'd ever get there. I mean, given the fact that the environmental community came in with the initiative, on the one hand, and then we had lots of upset people after Growth One was adopted. And when it was negotiated, on the other hand, the negotiations were long and tough; I questioned whether we could actually reach agreement on a lot of these things. But we did, and in large part that's due to the character of the elected leadership, the Steel Magnolias, Speaker King, Senator Hayner, and Booth Gardner who was a key player on this Growth Management Act. Because remember Chris Gregoire was his Department of Ecology director—and one of the issues that Booth really cared about was the whole issue of protecting wetlands and sensitive areas. And he had tried prior to Growth Management One to pass legislation to do that and had been unable to do so. And I can tell you a little story about that. King County was really the only county that cared about wetlands legislation but the ag community, of course, cared a lot about it because they were being impacted. They saw that this protection of wetlands meant a reduction in cropland, that they had to control their livestock, that they had to take measures that were difficult and very hard to do in some cases—in other cases maybe not so difficult, but it was controversial nonetheless. As the bill was proceeding through the legislative process, it was clear to me that it wasn't going anywhere so the Governor called me in initially, with Chris, and called in Dick Ducharme who was representing the ag interests on the wetland issue at that point in time. He called us both into his office to try to negotiate. We negotiated on day one and got nowhere. Governor Gardner blasted Dick Ducharme for being obstinate. That night Chris Gregoire called me at home and said, "We've got a deal here that's acceptable to them, I suggest that you accept this otherwise Booth is going to blast you tomorrow." So we came in and said, "Yes, we can agree to this. Well, it didn't work because in the end the ag interests weren't too happy about it and the enviros were not very happy about it so once that proposal hit the street it blew up again. And so nothing was happening, and so that was, I think, maybe a year or two prior to GMA. So what happened as a part of the GMA process, that Booth played a significant role in was the requirement that all counties plan for resource lands and critical areas, that was Booth

Gardner's contribution to this thing, singular contribution to this thing, which is, in my opinion, most significant to that entire act. I mean in terms of what the political implications of that have been over time leading up to now, I know I'm repeating myself. We now have an initiative here that's gathering signatures on this.

Rita: How well do you think the growth management hearings boards are doing in carrying out their duties?

Ron: Well, I'm not that close to it anymore, but just from what I see I think that they're doing—at least what I've observed in certain cases—what they were intended to do, which is to act as an appeals body. But again, I don't keep involved in specific cases; no doubt we'll have a lot of other opinions about that. And I know they have, and I know that even some of the Steel Magnolias have had, second thoughts about some of those issues. I guess it's done what it was intended to do and even so no one has successfully accused it as being a top-down planning process.

Tape 2, Side 1

Rita: In terms of how the GMA is structured, what do you think are the most important parts of the law?

Ron: Well, there are a lot of important parts to the law but probably the most important part of the law is the requirement that counties plan and establish urban growth boundaries. I think, again, that goes back to the notion that if we're going to plan effectively we've got to devise an investment strategy that makes sense. And in order to have an investment strategy that makes sense, we've got to say, "How are we going to accommodate the growth that we anticipated in the next several years within the constraints that we've got to work with it?" So I think that that's been good.

I think the other important piece that's often overlooked is the fact that one of the principle drivers behind the GMA is that urban areas accept density. And that we accommodate to the greatest extent possible growth inside areas that are already well served by infrastructure. And I think that that has happened. The only failing that I see has to do with the fact that we've not had enough money to do the investment strategy. The Legislature between 1990 and the last couple of years moved to improve gas tax increases that used to occur on a routine basis. The fact that these initiatives have passed that have eliminated motor vehicle and excise taxes, or reduced property taxes, reduce revenue that was otherwise available to provide infrastructure to support growth. I think that those are problems.

As I mentioned earlier, it was always my hope that counties would assume a more regional role and that's what we were working for. Unfortunately, in King County rather than have existing cities in that unincorporated area that was included within an urban growth boundary annex unincorporated territory, too often those areas decided to incorporate themselves. And that has created, I think, a stumbling block towards implementing the main policies of the GMA because, in many cases, those were defensive incorporations. And Brian Derdowski was actually the leading proponent in those kinds of defensive incorporations. In other words, because certain folks didn't agree with the underlying premise that growth ought to occur in a way that makes rational, financial sense, there are a number of people out there that just think growth simply shouldn't occur. So for them to do defensive-type incorporation is one tool to try to frustrate the growth of the act, and I think to some extent that's happened to King County. And that's a shame.

And in addition, while the counties were supposed to be more regional, the second piece of that puzzle was that counties needed additional revenue to perform those regional roles. And again, because of the underlying tax structure between counties and cities that doesn't work well—counties have been shortchanged. And again, of course, because of the tax cutting initiatives in the past that's exacerbated the problem for

counties. So, in a lot of respects for the counties, I think some of the underlying objectives in the Growth Management Act have not been met. However, as I fly over Central Puget Sound, you see an urban growth boundary, I mean you see it, you see where the boundary is, a pretty bright line. So it's worked to that extent. But I don't think anybody would disagree with the notion that more money to finance the infrastructure to support that growth has been a significant issue.

Rita: Right, something the Legislature needs to still address.

Ron: Still need to be addressed, so hopefully that will happen.

Rita: What was the early process for local government to begin their work under the Growth Management Act? How did counties respond?

Ron: Well, I can really only speak for King County about that. I mean King County responded by creating an intergovernmental process to adopt county-wide planning policies. So that was a key first step, and that happened fairly early after the passage of the act, and those policies were adopted. Initially in King County those policies were adopted early.

In other counties in the state, you know, there were cases that subsequently where you had counties that were refusing to comply. I think Chelan County was in that position for a while and there were actually sanctions as I recall. But you know there were strong political opinions principally in the rural areas of the state; that this Growth Management Act was not a good thing principally because, I think as I said earlier, a number of counties actually opted to plan under GMA because it was a way to get some financial assistance and technical assistance from the department. But the real key piece was the requirement that they all adopt these sensitive areas, and that really triggered a landslide of criticism in rural areas.

Rita: And controversy.

Ron: And controversy, and still does. And it's a tough issue. But the Legislature has never modified that. You know, they could if they wanted but—

Rita: They could give more direction on how to do it if they wanted to.

Ron: If they want to, you know. So there's never really been, that I've seen at least, a concerted effort and any meaningful way to go after some of the underlying policy drivers of the act. I mean there have, of course, been a number of efforts to do away with the hearings boards and a lot of people are upset with that. You know these are the rural folks that don't like the idea at all, but you know those have not been successful. Even when Republican and rural interest had the majority in both houses it was tough to go out and do something like that. So they tried but they just couldn't get it done because in the final analysis, the political reality is that Republicans—you know the demographics of where the Republicans live in suburban areas. I mean, although that is interesting to watch those demographics change now over time, as though suburban areas effectively have become more urban. And you've seen that in places like the 41st and the 48th districts right now. But nonetheless, even rib-rock conservative Republicans that are living out in Issaquah and places like that say, "Hey, enough is enough. Don't do this to us." And so it makes it difficult, I think, to reiterate that the people still care about this, they still care about this.

Rita: Name the five most important success of the Growth Management Act from the viewpoint of counties?

Ron Main: Well, from King County's perspective or from an urban county perspective, I think it might be easier to do that. From a rural county perspective, they might not share the same views. But I think that singularly and perhaps most importantly, the Growth Management Act provided a framework for them to put

together a planning process and plans and investment strategies. And you have to do an urban growth boundary as part of the planning process. I guess the key thing is despite the fact that there are lots of problems that have been identified with the act, the Legislature has been unwilling to do anything significant to change it. So that must, again, speak something for the fact that it's working and its durability.

Rita: Okay, any other successes besides the framework?

Ron: Well, that in my mind kind of says it all. I can't really point to some specific outcomes. I guess I've sort of done that.

Rita: Well, it being the framework, that's pretty important.

Ron: Yes, that's a pretty big deal.

Rita: How has the Growth Management Act evolved? What significant things have been accomplished under the Growth Management Act by counties to meet the goal that the law was intended to achieve?

Ron: Well, I don't think I'm able to really give you much of an answer on that. I've been away from county government for some time now, and I think that based on what I've heard it seems to be working and people are using it. And as I said, the issues around the Growth Management Act have been, "How often are we going to update this? Who's going to pay for the update?" I mean, I hear that kind of stuff from local governments. But there are other drivers around growth management that have kind of taken center stage. Like, "What are we going to do about investment strategies for transportation? What are we doing about water and all the lakes," to whether or not you've got the wherewithal to invest or to implement growth management?

Rita: Well the next question is, how has the GMA changed land use patterns in the state? And you already talked about that when you talked about going up in the airplane and seeing the urban/rural line.

Ron: Particularly in Central Puget Sound, you know, where most of the growth has occurred over the years, but even now in Thurston County you see it. Thurston County has an urban growth plan, but what I see in Thurston County and Whatcom County, I've lived in both places, is implementation of the act. When you see development actually going out to the urban growth boundary now, I mean you see some accommodation of growth taking place here in Thurston and also in Whatcom, and to some extent in Skagit as well, where they're responding to new population growth. But most of the population growth has occurred in the Central Puget Sound Region and there you can actually see it. You can see it on a map, for instance, the Sound Transit boundary is basically the urban growth boundary in King County.

Rita: Do you have any comments you'd like to make on the amendments to the Growth Management Act that had been made over the years?

Ron: Not really, I mean I haven't really been involved in those.

Rita: So the next question is, how has the Growth Management Act shaped various communities, and give us some examples about how it is working for counties? Or do you have any comments on that other than you've talked about the GMA being the framework, that it offers the infrastructure tie, and also the part about the importance of urban growth areas and how the density is going inside those areas. So do you have anything else you'd like to add?

Ron: Well, I think that achieving the density that needs to be accommodated under the act continues to be a significant challenge in some communities. And I've already talked about the fact that we've had some defensive incorporation in King County rather than annexation that have refused to take growth. In fact, I think there have been one or two appeals to the growth management hearings boards over the zoning policies

of certain communities where they're trying to restrict density—and I think that that's a good thing because, and this is where the argument still rages about the whole approach here, on growth management. You've got a number of folks that say, "Density is what it is, and it's a pattern that should not be interfered with, this is America and this is the way it happens. We're going to have low density, we're going to have sprawl, and we're going to design around that. And it's actually less harmful and easier to do." And then, of course, we have people that say, "Well, wait a minute, you know if you've got limited resources to invest, Where are you going to invest in those resources? And if you're having to spread them throughout to a low-density population then how do you ever deal with meeting your needs in the long term?" And I think that continues to be a major challenge because if communities aren't willing to accept density, if people aren't willing to live that way, then the act will fail. There's clearly a demand for dense housing. For instance, when you look at downtown Seattle and you know that Tacoma will do the same thing and others, when the people like moving back into cities, like being able to walk, particularly as the baby-boom generation starts to retire and you're going to see more and more demand for that type of housing.

Rita: If they have attractive, well-designed places they can live.

Ron: Well-designed alternatives, you know, with communities and with the investments there to handle it, and that's the significance. I mean, in Seattle I think they're doing a terrific job, obviously. But these other communities need to do the same thing. I think Bellevue is doing a pretty good job in their planning, but I think that some of the other more bedroom-type communities are resisting that. And that's where the problem starts, in my opinion.

Rita: How did the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development react to the GMA?

Ron Main: Well, they were involved in putting it together, obviously. The department was not by any means the silent observer, sitting on the sidelines. Your people were right there, every step of the way. They played a significant role in how this thing came together. And, of course, it played a significant role in implementing it. So I think your department has done the job it was assigned to do and carried it out. I'm sure you've had people complain to you about issues and approaches but you're doing your job.

Rita: Well, mostly the department got some compliments in our interviews, and they got some criticism so that's just probably what you'd imagine.

Ron: Oh, I can imagine that. I mean, I haven't observed you in the last several years so I don't know how you're approaching it now. But you did what you were assigned to do and you did a good job.

Rita: How do you view growth management today?

Ron: I think it's working for the most part. I think there are significant challenges that are still before us with respect to that, and I think I've hit on most of those. The principal one being, Do we have the money and are we going to invest to make these communities work? And are we willing to make the tough decisions about where growth is going to occur? And do we have the money to support it? All of those are important issues. There are still, in my mind, unresolved issues that could be addressed. But how you finance this, how you make this, how you implement this act the way that was intended, I think, remains the number one challenge.

Rita: If another state wanted to adopt a growth management act, what advice would you give them?

Ron: Don't do it.

Rita: [laughs]

Ron: I don't know. I mean every state is different, you know. Obviously, Oregon is one direction and they

had an initiative that passed. Of course, all of that has got to be sorted out. But I guess the only thing I'd be careful of, and I guess maybe this is more of a political concern than anything else at this point in time, is that while I understand Governor Gardner's motivation and his wanting to make sure that every county was required to identify sensitive areas, that requirement has, I think, generated a lot of animosity towards the act. I guess I would say that you need to think through what you're doing here and what the political ramifications might be, particularly in rural areas where you just create so much animosity that it can divide a state in two. I mean, if you talk to folks on the Eastside you hear a lot of that.

Rita: And they have fewer wetlands.

Ron: But it might be better to say, "Hey, wait a minute. What are we trying to protect here?" And in an urban growth area, where we've got sensitive areas, say "We've got to protect them and so let's focus on protecting those as we accommodate growth around them." But in rural areas where you're not going to experience urban growth, at least, you know, unless the economy just dramatically changes and lord knows they try to do that from time to time. Is there a need to really go in with these kinds of requirements? And I would advise another state to say, "Be careful, decide what the problems are and focus on those problems, because if you overreach it can create a backlash that can have some serious consequences and create some serious division that shouldn't be." While I compliment Governor Gardner for his tenacity, and I give him credit for that, but I think that the long-term implications of that have been something that maybe we should have thought about back then.

Rita: Do you have any additional comments?

Ron: I'm sure I will. I'll walk out of here, five minutes from now saying, "Gee whiz, I forgot the most important piece." But I can't think of anything.

Rita: Well, thank you very much. It's been great.

Ron: Thank you.

Tape 2, Side 2

Rita: Do you want to add a comment about intergovernmental cooperation?

Ron: Well, let's just talk about one more thing here that I probably forgot to mention. And it goes back to the process of assigning responsibilities, prime responsibilities among cities and counties. And, as I said, I was interested in seeing that counties focused on being more of a regional service provider and the Growth Management Act enabled that to some extent, particularly through adoption of the county-wide planning policies. And I think that watching the way those have worked, they have brought cities and counties closer together in a cooperative planning mode to make sure that policies that are developed will work; and to provide a pulpit for making sure that the objectives of the GMA can be achieved. And, I suppose, around the state you are going to hear different things, that the cities are far more interested in achieving, in some cases, the goals of the GMA than are the counties. But when you look at Central Puget Sound, I think that in particular that the processes that have occurred there have been productive and the cities and counties have worked together better than they have in the past because they have a common goal now. There are still conflicts, and there are still problems that need to be addressed and the counties need additional resources, I think, to fulfill their regional responsibilities. And perhaps there needs to be some adjustment of revenue as accruing between cities and counties. And actually, in some respects, if the streamline sales tax is adopted, in my view that may have a more significant impact on growth management than any other single financial policy that I can think of because one of the major drivers for cities has been their tax base. In fact, as I digress a little bit, when I was in college,

I did a study of annexation in the Green River Valley, you know by Kent and Auburn and other cities, and then tried to do a cost benefit analysis on how long it was going to take them to get the revenue necessary to provide the services that they were going to provide. And then I was also involved in the wildlife preservation program in King County where we watched development rights. In any event, I digress...

Rita: So would you explain to us what the streamline sales tax is?

Ron: The streamline sales tax, what that does is it changes the site for tax from the warehouse where the product is delivered, which are usually located in cities, to where the consumer resides. So if it's an Internet sale, but others as well, the tax follows the consumer. In other words, if you live in the unincorporated area, and you buy something from Amazon, and you pay sales tax on that, the sales tax accrues under current law wherever Amazon's distribution point is, whatever city that it is located in gets the local sales tax revenue. The state, of course, gets its share no matter where it is. But under the streamline sales tax, the jurisdiction that gets the tax will be the jurisdiction where the end consumer lives, where you live. So if you're living in an unincorporated county then you're going to get the tax. So that really kind of changes, I think, long-term, the whole dynamic of why cities are bringing in and accommodating these warehouse centers, or large retail centers, because of the tax benefits that accrue to cities for doing that. It's going to be different. And the law, I don't know that it's going to pass this session, it may not, but the cities have agreed to it now. They were fighting a long time on this, but there is a mitigation plan that is put into effect that will allow it so that it's not a sudden change and impact. But that will have, I think, a significant impact on GMA that nobody's quite thinking about yet.

But going back to my original point about city and county cooperation—I think that as a result of the act and, in fact, this streamline sales tax thing may create a little bit more of that.

Rita: So before the Growth Management Act was passed, what were the relationships between King County and the local governments, the cities in King County? What we heard after the GMA was passed was that it was helpful because there were some places where the cities and counties hadn't talked to each other for years. So that was one of the first things that was talked about as a success. But what about in King County? Were the cities working well with the county, or did the Growth Management Act help that quite a bit?

Ron: Well, I think the Growth Management Act obviously created a venue where cities in King County and the county had to work together. But there were other issues in King County that were driving that kind of collaboration as well. Not the least of which was the assumption of Metro buses by King County, which came because of a federal lawsuit that challenged the constitutional makeup of the Metro council and found it unconstitutional. So ensuing from that decision were negotiations among King County and its cities about how to restructure county government to assimilate those Metro functions. And part and parcel of that, in fact, approved under the charter were the creation of regional committees as part of the county council structure. And on those regional committees sit city elected officials so there are, I think, three of them. So there's that kind of communication in King County, but that's kind of unique to King County. And relationships between King County and its cities go up and down all the time, but there are lots of structures there for resolving those issues. Part of the problem with King County is that there are just too many cities. As I noted earlier, a lot of those incorporated cities should have annexed rather than incorporated. And then when Initiative 695 passed and the motor vehicle excise tax went away so did sales tax equalization for cities, which was the only way that some of these cities could incorporate and support themselves because they didn't have enough other activity or

tax base commercially to support any kind of rational distribution of services. So it's been a real problem for a number of those cities as well.

Rita: Thank you.

Ron: Thank you.